assess the likely shortfall in rice production during the kharif season as the planting of crop is still going on in some areas.

(c) No difficulty is apprehended in meeting the demand of rice in the country, in event of some shortfall in rice production, as there is enough buffer stock of rice available. Moreover, the shortfall in production of rice during kharif season can be made good to some extent during rabi-summer season.

Stamping technology for improvement of coking coal

203. PROF. SOURENDRA BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) whether the proposal for adopting stamping technology for improvement of coking coal as used by the steel industry has been pending with the SAIL;

(b) whether a detailed study was conducted by some foreign experts on the question of coking coal blending a few years ago;

(c) whether Indian coking coal was found to have basic ingredients for improving the standard required by steel industry for increasing the production; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE (INDEPENDENT CHARGE) OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV): (a) Yes, Sir. There are two proven technologies for improving coke quality. They are Stamp Charging technology and technology for Partial Briquetting of Coal Charge (PBCC.) In view of the lower capital cost of adoption of technology for PBCC, and in consideration of rapid fluctuations in indigenous coal qualities, SAIL's preference, in general, is to adopt technology for PBCC and to consider the adoption of Stamp Charging Technology in specific cases wherein the quality of input coals is assured on a long term basis and where introduction is found feasible in existing group of batteries.

(b) to (d) A German firm had tested samples of Indian blended coals in 1983-84 and the results showed that the coal had ingredients necessary for improving coke quality through partial briquetting of coal charge or stamp charging technologies.

Import of coking coal by SAIL

204. PROF. SOURENDRA BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) whether the SAIL has been importing increased quantity of coking coal despite the foreign exchange constraints;

(b) the expenditure incurred during the last three years in the import of coking coal by the SAIL; and

(c) what are the details of the steps which are being contemplated for reducing the import bill of coking coal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE (INDEPENDENT CHARGE) OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV): (a) and (b) Every year all the quantities of cooking coal produced indigenously are consumed by the steel sector and imports are resorted to meet only the balance requirement both in qualitative and quantitative terms. Increasing imports of coking coal by SAIL reflect the widening gap between SAIL's requirements and quantities of coal indigenously available. From the angle of foreign exchange conservation, import of coking coal is better than import of steel. Expenditure on the import of coking coal by SAIL over the last three years is as under:—

Year	Expenditure : Approx. (C & F value Rs. in crores)
1988-89	329.5
1989-90	426.8
1990-91	543.8